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THE RARE FORMS OF ORCHIDS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF J. DYBOWSKI.



THE varieties of plants which, under various titles, charm us as house-ornaments, and give our habitations a character of freshness and life that is always dear to us, are already numerous. Right along with their growing number goes our increasing affection for them. They are not of the kind of things we tire of as soon as we become acquainted with them; but the more intimately we know them the more disposed we are to seek for new ones. They will never become common. We might suppose that, the more numerous rare flowers become and the more fond amateurs grow of them, common flowers would fall into neglect. But this is not so. We are not only fond of flowers but they are rare or precious, but we love them also for themselves and for the attractions of their own that they possess. In the grand army of flowers which seem made to impress a tone of the gay on the sober background of our existence, there are some stately ones that appear to constitute a kind of aristocracy of this enchanting world.

Such flowers are the subject of our present essay. The orchids, conquerors of the light, may well claim pardon for their triumph over their humble companions of the gardens, for their victory is fairly achieved. They astonish us when we first examine them, then charm us. Nature has been liberal with them, and they have everything. Their flowers are full of that curious charm that captivates. Their colors are harmoniously toned and always bright and elegant. Their odor is sweet and penetrating, but does not cloy. Notwithstanding their thin texture, which gives them a delicate and frail air, they last



FIG. 1.—ORCHIDS, *Cattleya nussia* (bluish mauve).

longer than other ornamental flowers. Nothing, in fact, seems to be wanting to them but a more lively and abundant foliage; and that can be supplied by mingling fern leaves with them.

It was long supposed that these wonderful plants were extremely delicate and capricious. This was a mistake. To their other virtues they join the rare one of simplicity.

Nearly all the orchids, cultivated in greenhouses are natives of the intertropical zone, and it was supposed from this fact that they required considerable heat. But it has gradually been established that a high temperature really hinders their best development. A considerable number of them in their native state grow on high mountains, under exposure to a bracing atmosphere; and they are now cultivated in moderately warmed and freely ventilated greenhouses. They are therefore relatively hardy plants, well adapted to the decoration of our rooms.

The genera and species of orchids already known are very numerous, but the varieties are more so. The cause of the multiplicity of form, shade, and appearance lies chiefly in the organization of the flower. Without going into technical details and descriptions, it is enough to say that the pollen is not spontaneously carried to the stigma, and that a foreign agent has to intervene in the fertilization of the seed. The office is discharged by insects, which visit the flowers for their honey and involuntarily load themselves with pollen; then, flying from one flower to another of different varieties and species, they effect all kinds of mixtures. Consequently, varieties are end-

lessly multiplied. While many of these may be common, others obtain special hues or streaks, which render them rare and cause them to be sought out by collectors. Now that orchids are in full favor, and are likely to continue so for a long time, enormous prices are paid for the choice varieties.

A *Cattleya* (Fig. 1), shown at a recent horticultural exhibition in Paris, had a light violet-blue corolla instead of the usual rose-violet. This sport in color was enough to raise the price of the plant to ten thousand or twelve thousand francs.



FIG. 2.—ORCHIDS GROWING IN A ROOM.

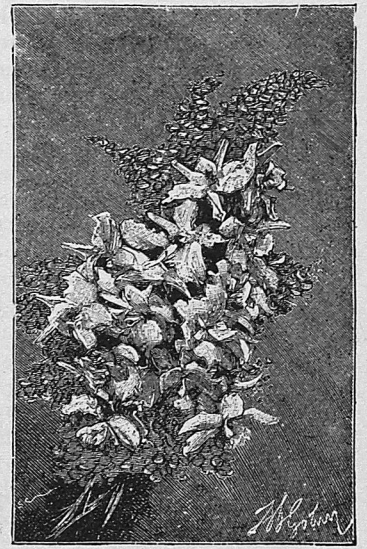


FIG. 3.—CORSAGE BOUQUET OF ORCHIDS.

The owner—M. Piret, of Argenteuil—had himself sought out the variety in the forests of Venezuela. The instance is not a rare one. At a recent sale in Ghent, every specimen of a certain *Cypripedium* brought six thousand francs; and like prices are often obtained in England. The ordinary prices in trade are, however, more moderate than this. As the result of numerous explorations, often made at great risk of life, orchids of all kinds and of the more usual varieties have been imported by thousands within the last few years, and are sold at reasonable prices; and the business of dealing in them returns little profit unless some of the rarer varieties are on the list.

While it is difficult and dangerous to go to their native haunts for orchids, it is not much more easy to possess the rarer

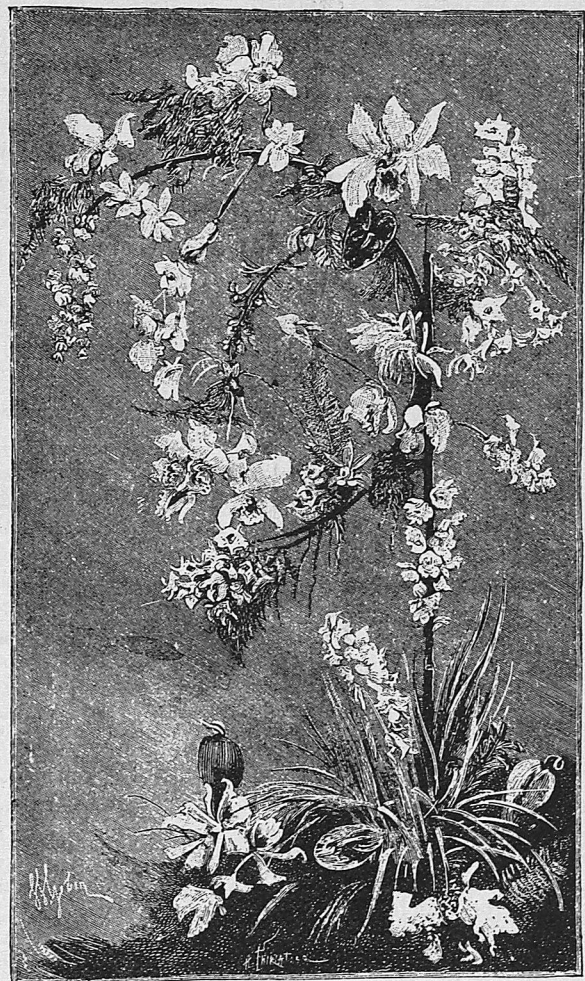


FIG. 4.—MOTIVE IN CUT ORCHIDS, MOUNTED ON BAMBOO.

varieties in cultivation; for, while the care of adult plants is comparatively easy, the raising of the seedlings is attended for many years with almost insurmountable difficulties. But culti-

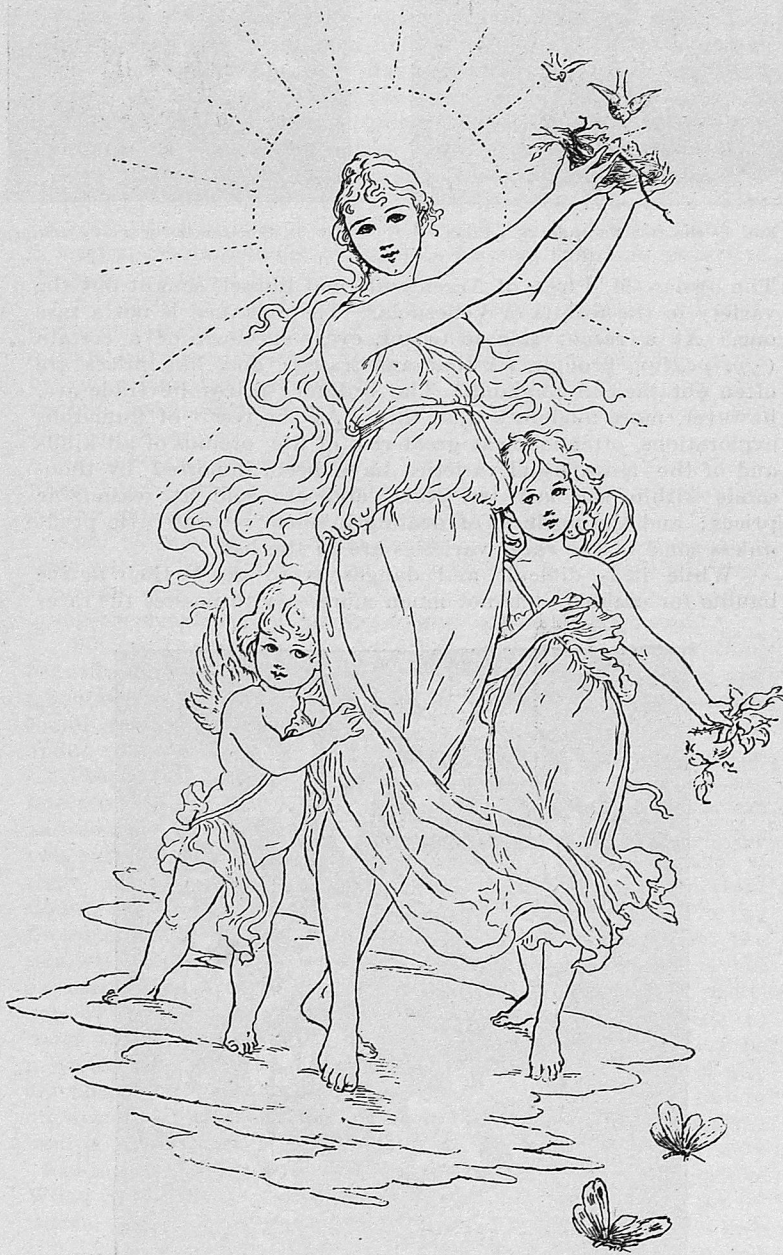
THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

vators have become possessed with the idea that it would be well to imitate with species selected for their beauty and good forms the accidental hybridizations of the forests. Many have tried; a few have succeeded. One of the first among these was M. Bleu, General Secretary of the French Horticultural Society. He cross-fertilized, sowed the seeds, and raised young plants. To appreciate the difficulties of these operations, they must be followed out. In the first place, the seeds are so fine that they cannot be seen without a strong glass; they are sown on the bark of trees or in chopped moss; and they are transplanted when the plants are so small that the work has to be done by the aid of a magnifier. These material difficulties are still as nothing compared with the care that has to be given the nurslings to secure a good development of them. The cultivator may consider himself fortunate if he gets a few dozen plants out of several thousand seedlings.

Orchids in all their varieties of aspect and form have very different ways of growing. Some, like the lady's slippers (*Cypripedium*) and the superb *Odontoglossums*, are ground plants; others, perhaps most of the class, are epiphytes, attaching themselves to the bark of trees, where they live at considerable heights above the soil. Of this class are the fragrant *Cattleya*

attaching orchids mingled with branches of asparagus to moss-covered bamboo sticks, is shown in Fig. 4. On account of their enduring freshness orchids are favorite flowers for bouquets to be worn on festive occasions, and a considerable trade has been developed in flowers for such uses. Favorite kinds for this purpose are the *Odontoglossums*, with handsome white, starry flowers, and the *Oncidium papilio*, with its butterfly-shaped corolla.

The enormous sums that are often paid for orchids are derided as foolish, and the extravagance is sometimes compared with the craze that once raged about tulips. The two fashions are not to be compared; for there is something real and solid about orchids, which will always give them rank among the finest and most highly esteemed flowers; while tulips are not fine, and soon suffered a loss of the extravagant admiration that prevailed for them for a time. New varieties of the rose, although it is a very old flower, still bring higher prices than the rarest of orchids.



THE MAID OF THE SUN WITH AMOR AND PSYCHE.



PSYCHE LED BY SORROW TO TRUTH.

and the splendid *Phalanopsis*, so elegant with great bunches of white or rose-colored flowers.

It follows from this great diversity of exigencies that orchids lend themselves readily to all possible combinations in the ornamentation of rooms. Some are cultivated in pots and help in the decoration of *jardinères* (Fig. 2); others, which live on the trunks of trees, can be placed in hanging baskets, or fixed in front of a mirror which will reflect their graceful figures.

Orchids will last a long time in a room if proper care has been taken in cutting and transporting them. The flower will sometimes keep its freshness for two or three weeks. Their preservation may be prolonged by covering them every evening with a sheet of silk paper, which will protect them from dust and excessive evaporation. They lend themselves remarkably well to the formation of bouquets, where their quality of keeping fresh for weeks gives them much value. An effective group shown at a horticultural exhibition in Paris, which was formed by

PROBABLY all nations in former times held one or more types of nature in especial regard, and with these in view introduced certain peculiarities of style into decoration. We suspect that even the Arabs, though eschewing natural forms, favored as a type, which they very effectually disguised, a plant with curling leaves, the key to which is probably to be found in their branches springing on opposite sides from one central stem or in the borders of clustered stems combined with a vague semblance of leaves, often arranged to run in opposite directions. One thing is to be said of the Arabs—that they both knew where to put ornament and to keep it subservient to general effect as well as to make it beautiful and effective. Similarly the adopted type of the western mediævalists is unknown, but it may reasonably be surmised that it was a plant with deeply channeled stalks and leaves, the latter formed in their ornament into four or five divisions with ends raised like embossed work.